The Mismeasure of Man (rev) by Stephen Jay Gould (1981).

Overview:

Gould traces and analyzes the science of the study of the measure human intelligence from craniometry through intelligence testing. Trained as a “hard” scientist, Gould critiques the use and analysis of the data used to arrive at statements that were social correct for the time, but blatantly racist for our times. He examines the science data and scientists that proved that white men really were more intelligent than any other race and gender. The original book ended with Cyril Burt and factor analysis. The revised edition ends with Gould’s analysis (attack?) on Herrnstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve*.

As science:

Gould examines the misuse and abuse of science to promote social beliefs on race.

In “studies” on craniometry, accepted as science in the time, he finds that scientists used few data samples and ignored data that would not support the hypothesis.

Gould examines Binet’s original purpose behind intelligence testing and its adoption in the US by Stafford. Binet originally was looking for a way to identify children who might need more support in education. According to Gould, Binet had three rules for using his tests: (Gould, p. 185)

1. “The scores are a practical device…” They don’t measure anything other than the difference in abilities, nothing “innate or permanent.”
2. The tests are a “rough guide” to finding children who need help in school; not to be use to “rank normal children.”
3. The tests are to find children who need special help, not to label children as unable.

The American culture adopts the belief that intelligence is innate and hereditary.

Yerkes uses the drafting of soldiers for WWI as an opportunity to norm his intelligence tests and convinces the army it will help them find out who is “officer material.”

The tests themselves include culture specific questions that yield results that southern Europeans (immigrants with limited English and time in the US) were less intelligent than northern Europeans (Spoke English and more representative of “mainstream” culture.) When the intelligence tests also begin to show that there is no difference in capabilities of blacks and whites, testing conditions are dramatically altered for blacks; Yerkes throws out the original data as “tainted” because the results were not what he expected (desired?).

Spearman searches for general intelligence, quantifying it as something which can be measured. It is referred to as “g.” ( I actually read a study that referred to Spearman’s work with “g”.) It really is about the idea of quantifying something like intelligence, something that one isn’t sure really exists in the first place.

My notes of direct quotes:

“Objectivity must be operationally defined as fair treatment of data, not the absence of preference. Moreover, one needs to understand and acknowledge inevitable preferences in order to know their influence – so that fair treatment of data and arguments can be attained.” (36)

“The argument begins with one of the fallacies *– reification*, or our tendency to convert abstract concepts into entities…” (56)

“We therefore give the word “intelligence” to this wondrously complex and multifaceted set of human capabilities…Once intelligence becomes an entity, standard procedures of science virtually dictate that a location and physical substrate be sought for it.” (56)

“Shall we believe that science is different today simply because we share the cultural context of most practicing scientists and mistake its influence for objective truth?” (106)

“Scientific racists and sexists often confine their label of inferiority to a single disadvantaged group; but race, sex, and class go together, and each acts as a surrogate for the others. Individual studies may be limited in scope, but the general philosophy of biological determinism pervades – hierarchies of advantage and disadvantage follow the dictates of nature; stratification reflects biology.” (112)

“If it is to have any enduring value, sound debunking must do more than replace one social prejudice with another. It must use more adequate biology to drive out fallacious ideas.” (352)

“Human uniqueness lies in the flexibility of what our brains can do.” (361)

“..we cannot use such an experimental method [controlling in a laboratory for one factor variable at a time], particularly for most social phenomena when importation into the laboratory destroys the subject of our investigation…” (367)

“Therefore, the positive correlations say nothing in themselves about causes.” (373)

“What this means in English is that you cannot predict what a given person will do from his IQ score…” (375)